



Postwar Uncertainty

MAIN IDEA

SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

The postwar period was one of loss and uncertainty but also one of invention, creativity, and new ideas.

WHY IT MATTERS NOW

Postwar trends in physics, psychiatry, art, literature, communication, music, and transportation still affect our lives.

TERMS & NAMES

- Albert Einstein
- theory of relativity
- Sigmund Freud
- existentialism
- Friedrich Nietzsche
- surrealism
- jazz
- Charles Lindbergh

SETTING THE STAGE The horrors of World War I shattered the Enlightenment belief that progress would continue and reason would prevail. In the postwar period, people began questioning traditional beliefs. Some found answers in new scientific developments, which challenged the way people looked at the world. Many enjoyed the convenience of technological improvements in transportation and communication. As society became more open, women demanded more rights, and young people adopted new values. Meanwhile, unconventional styles and ideas in literature, philosophy, and music reflected the uncertain times.

A New Revolution in Science

The ideas of Albert Einstein and Sigmund Freud had an enormous impact on the 20th century. These thinkers were part of a scientific revolution as important as that brought about centuries earlier by Copernicus and Galileo.

Impact of Einstein's Theory of Relativity German-born physicist [Albert Einstein](#) offered startling new ideas on space, time, energy, and matter. Scientists had found that light travels at exactly the same speed no matter what direction it moves in relation to earth. In 1905, Einstein theorized that while the speed of light is constant, other things that seem constant, such as space and time, are not. Space and time can change when measured relative to an object moving near the speed of light—about 186,000 miles per second. Since relative motion is the key to Einstein's idea, it is called the [theory of relativity](#). Einstein's ideas had implications not only for science but also for how people viewed the world. Now uncertainty and relativity replaced Isaac Newton's comforting belief of a world operating according to absolute laws of motion and gravity.

Influence of Freudian Psychology The ideas of Austrian physician [Sigmund Freud](#) were as revolutionary as Einstein's. Freud treated patients with psychological problems. From his experiences, he constructed a theory about the human mind. He believed that much of human behavior is irrational, or beyond reason. He called the irrational part of the mind the unconscious. In the unconscious, a number of drives existed, especially pleasure-seeking drives, of which the conscious mind was unaware. Freud's ideas weakened faith in reason. Even so, by the 1920s, Freud's theories had developed widespread influence.

TAKING NOTES

Summarizing Use a chart to identify two people who contributed to each field.

Field	Contributors
science	
literature and philosophy	
art and music	
technology	

Literature in the 1920s

The brutality of World War I caused philosophers and writers to question accepted ideas about reason and progress. Disillusioned by the war, many people also feared the future and expressed doubts about traditional religious beliefs. Some writers and thinkers expressed their anxieties by creating disturbing visions of the present and the future.

In 1922, T. S. Eliot, an American poet living in England, wrote that Western society had lost its spiritual values. He described the postwar world as a barren “wasteland,” drained of hope and faith. In 1921, the Irish poet William Butler Yeats conveyed a sense of dark times ahead in the poem “The Second Coming”: “Things fall apart; the centre cannot hold; / Mere anarchy is loosed upon the world.”

Writers Reflect Society’s Concerns The horror of war made a deep impression on many writers. The Czech-born author Franz Kafka wrote eerie novels such as *The Trial* (1925) and *The Castle* (1926). His books feature people caught in threatening situations they can neither understand nor escape. The books struck a chord among readers in the uneasy postwar years.

Many novels showed the influence of Freud’s theories on the unconscious. The Irish-born author James Joyce gained widespread attention with his stream-of-consciousness novel *Ulysses* (1922). This book focuses on a single day in the lives of three people in Dublin, Ireland. Joyce broke with normal sentence structure and vocabulary in a bold attempt to mirror the workings of the human mind.

Thinkers React to Uncertainties In their search for meaning in an uncertain world, some thinkers turned to the philosophy known as **existentialism**. A major leader of this movement was the philosopher Jean Paul Sartre (SAHR•truh) of France. Existentialists believed that there is no universal meaning to life. Each person creates his or her own meaning in life through choices made and actions taken.

Vocabulary

stream of consciousness: a literary technique used to present a character’s thoughts and feelings as they develop

> Analyzing Primary Sources

Writers of the “Lost Generation”

During the 1920s, many American writers, musicians, and painters left the United States to live in Europe. These expatriates, people who left their native country to live elsewhere, often settled in Paris. American writer Gertrude Stein called them the “Lost Generation.” They moved frantically from one European city to another, trying to find meaning in life. Life empty of meaning is the theme of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* (1925).

PRIMARY SOURCE

And as I sat there brooding on the old, unknown world, I thought of Gatsby’s wonder when he first picked out the green light at the end of Daisy’s dock. He had come a long way to this blue lawn, and his dream must have seemed so close that he could hardly fail to grasp it. He did not know that it was already behind him, somewhere back in that vast obscurity beyond the city, where the dark fields of the republic rolled on under the night.

Gatsby believed in the green light, the . . . future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning—

So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.

F. SCOTT FITZGERALD, *The Great Gatsby*



A 1920s photo of F. Scott Fitzgerald

DOCUMENT-BASED QUESTIONS

1. **Making Inferences** What seems to be the narrator’s attitude toward the future?
2. **Drawing Conclusions** How would you describe the overall mood of the excerpt?

The existentialists were influenced by the German philosopher **Friedrich Nietzsche** (NEE•chuh). In the 1880s, Nietzsche wrote that Western ideas such as reason, democracy, and progress had stifled people's creativity and actions. Nietzsche urged a return to the ancient heroic values of pride, assertiveness, and strength. His ideas attracted growing attention in the 20th century and had a great impact on politics in Italy and Germany in the 1920s and 1930s.

Revolution in the Arts

Although many of the new directions in painting and music began in the prewar period, they evolved after the war.

Artists Rebel Against Tradition Artists rebelled against earlier realistic styles of painting. They wanted to depict the inner world of emotion and imagination rather than show realistic representations of objects. Expressionist painters like Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky used bold colors and distorted or exaggerated forms.

Inspired by traditional African art, Georges Braque of France and Pablo Picasso of Spain founded Cubism in 1907. Cubism transformed natural shapes into geometric forms. Objects were broken down into different parts with sharp angles and edges. Often several views were depicted at the same time.

Surrealism, an art movement that sought to link the world of dreams with real life, was inspired by Freud's ideas. The term *surreal* means “beyond or above reality.” Surrealists tried to call on the unconscious part of their minds. Many of their paintings have an eerie, dreamlike quality and depict objects in unrealistic ways. **A**

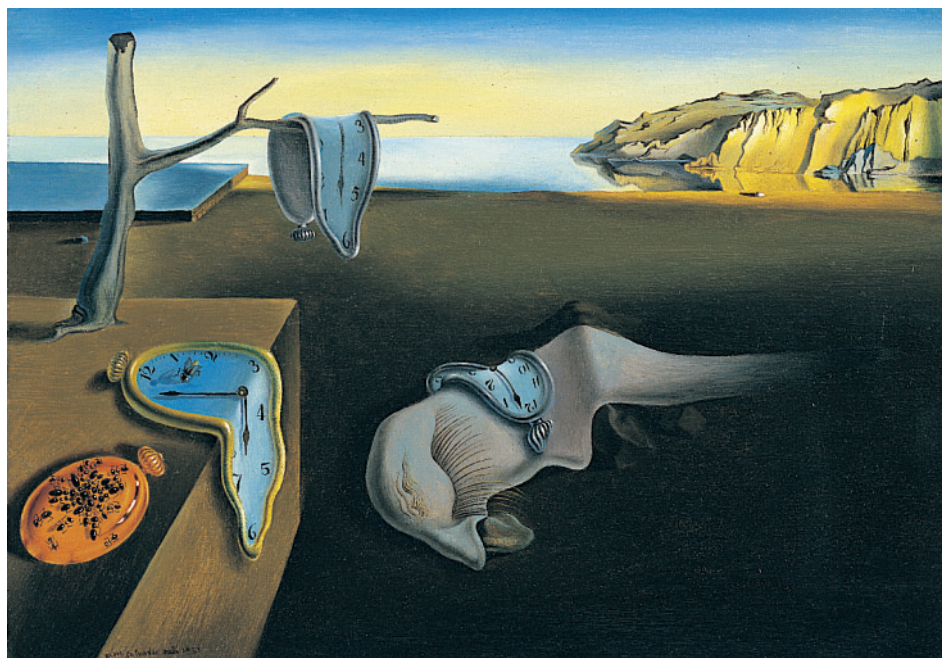
Composers Try New Styles In both classical and popular music, composers moved away from traditional styles. In his ballet masterpiece, *The Rite of Spring*, the Russian composer Igor Stravinsky used irregular rhythms and dissonances, or harsh combinations of sound. The Austrian composer Arnold Schoenberg rejected traditional harmonies and musical scales.

A new popular musical style called **jazz** emerged in the United States. It was developed by musicians, mainly African Americans, in New Orleans, Memphis, and Chicago. It swept the United States and Europe. The lively, loose beat of jazz seemed to capture the new freedom of the age.

MAIN IDEA

Making Inferences

A What was the major trend in postwar art?



◀ *The Persistence of Memory* (1931), a surrealist work by Spanish artist Salvador Dali, shows watches melting in a desert.



▲ Women like these marching in a 1912 suffrage parade in New York City helped gain American women's right to vote in 1920.

Society Challenges Convention

World War I had disrupted traditional social patterns. New ideas and ways of life led to a new kind of individual freedom during the 1920s. Young people especially were willing to break with the past and experiment with modern values.

Women's Roles Change The independent spirit of the times showed clearly in the changes women were making in their lives. The war had allowed women to take on new roles. Their work in the war effort was decisive in helping them win the right to vote. After the war, women's suffrage became law in many countries, including the United States, Britain, Germany, Sweden, and Austria.

Women abandoned restrictive clothing and hairstyles. They wore shorter, looser garments and had their hair "bobbed," or cut short. They also wore makeup, drove cars, and drank and smoked in public. Although most women still followed traditional paths of marriage and family, a growing number spoke out for greater freedom in their lives. Margaret Sanger and Emma Goldman risked arrest by speaking in favor of birth control. As women sought new careers, the numbers of women in medicine, education, journalism, and other professions increased. **B**

MAIN IDEA

Summarizing

B How did the changes of the postwar years affect women?

Technological Advances Improve Life

During World War I, scientists developed new drugs and medical treatments that helped millions of people in the postwar years. The war's technological advances were put to use to improve transportation and communication after the war.

The Automobile Alters Society The automobile benefited from a host of wartime innovations and improvements—electric starters, air-filled tires, and more powerful engines. Cars were now sleek and brightly polished, complete with headlights and chrome-plated bumpers. In prewar Britain, autos were owned exclusively by the rich. British factories produced 34,000 autos in 1913. After the war, prices dropped, and the middle class could afford cars. By 1937, the British were producing 511,000 autos a year.

Increased auto use by the average family led to lifestyle changes. More people traveled for pleasure. In Europe and the United States, new businesses opened to serve the mobile tourist. The auto also affected where people lived and worked. People moved to suburbs and commuted to work in the cities.

Airplanes Transform Travel International air travel became an objective after the war. In 1919, two British pilots made the first successful flight across the Atlantic, from Newfoundland to Ireland. In 1927, an American pilot named **Charles Lindbergh** captured world attention with a 33-hour solo flight from New York to Paris. Most of the world's major passenger airlines were established during the 1920s. At first only the rich were able to afford air travel. Still, everyone enjoyed the exploits of the aviation pioneers, including those of Amelia Earhart. She was an American who, in 1932, became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic.

Radio and Movies Dominate Popular Entertainment Guglielmo Marconi conducted his first successful experiments with radio in 1895. However, the real push for radio development came during World War I.

In 1920, the world's first commercial radio station—KDKA in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania—began broadcasting. Almost overnight, radio mania swept the United States. Every major city had stations broadcasting news, plays, and even live sporting events. Soon most families owned a radio.

Motion pictures were also a major industry in the 1920s. Many countries, from Cuba to Japan, produced movies. In Europe, film was a serious art form. However, in the Hollywood district of Los Angeles, where 90 percent of all films were made, movies were entertainment.

The king of Hollywood's silent screen was the English-born Charlie Chaplin, a comic genius best known for his portrayal of the lonely little tramp bewildered by life. In the late 1920s, the addition of sound transformed movies.

The advances in transportation and communication that followed the war had brought the world in closer touch. Global prosperity came to depend on the economic well-being of all major nations, especially the United States.



▲ Dressed in a ragged suit and oversize shoes, Charlie Chaplin's little tramp used gentle humor to get himself out of difficult situations.

MAIN IDEA

Recognizing Effects

What were the results of the peacetime adaptations of the technology of war?

SECTION 1 ASSESSMENT

TERMS & NAMES 1. For each term or name, write a sentence explaining its significance.

• Albert Einstein • theory of relativity • Sigmund Freud • existentialism • Friedrich Nietzsche • surrealism • jazz • Charles Lindbergh

USING YOUR NOTES

2. In your opinion, whose contribution has had the most lasting impact?

Field	Contributors
science	
literature and philosophy	

MAIN IDEAS

- Why were the ideas of Einstein and Freud revolutionary?
- How did literature in the 1920s reflect the uncertainty of the period?
- What impact did the increased use of the automobile have on average people?

CRITICAL THINKING & WRITING

- HYPOTHESIZING** Why do you think writers and artists began exploring the unconscious?
- DEVELOPING HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE** Why did some women begin demanding more political and social freedom?
- MAKING INFERENCES** Why were new medical treatments and inventions developed during World War I?
- WRITING ACTIVITY** **SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY** Write an advertisement that might have appeared in a 1920s newspaper or magazine for one of the technological innovations discussed in this section.

CONNECT TO TODAY PREPARING AN ORAL REPORT

Movies in the 1920s reflected the era. What do films made today say about our age? Review some recent, representative films and present your ideas in an oral report.